

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

WAIVER OF VA BENEFITS TO RECEIVE MILITARY PAY AND ALLOWANCES

Active or inactive duty training pay (drill pay) cannot legally be paid concurrently with VA disability compensation benefits. A veteran receiving VA disability compensation and serving in the National Guard or Reserves must waive either VA benefits or military pay and allowances. In most instances it will be to the veteran's advantage to waive VA benefits, as the military pay will be the greater amount. VA benefits are waived for the same number of days for which the veteran received drill pay. VA benefits are withheld at the rate in effect when the drills were performed, and the difference between that rate and the current rate is paid to the veteran. The period of withholding begins on the first of the month following the month in which the withholding is processed.

Those veterans wishing to retain military pay and allowances must file annual waivers. At the end of the fiscal year (September 30), the Department of Defense (DoD) sends VA a tape which identifies reservists or guardsmen who received drill pay and who also received VA benefits during the fiscal year just ended. If there has been an interruption in getting this data from DoD the tape may furnish drill pay data for one or more prior years as well.

The tape of individuals who received both VA benefits and drill pay will be used to generate VA Forms 21-8951 "Notice of Waiver of VA Compensation or Pension to Receive Military Pay and Allowances" with preprinted identification and drill pay data which will be sent to each reservist or guardsman identified on the match. The form will inform the veteran that DoD has identified him or her as a reservist or guardsman who has received active or inactive duty training pay. The form displays identifying information, the return address of the VA Regional Office of record, and the number of drill days obtained from the electronic file provided by DoD. If the form displays drill pay information for multiple fiscal years, the number of drill pay days will be shown by fiscal year.

The VA Form 21-8951 mailed to the veteran will give the individual the following options: (a) the veteran can check a box indicating agreement with the number of drill days

printed on the form and agree to waive a corresponding number of days of VA benefits; (b) the veteran can indicate that the number of drill pay days shown on the form is incorrect, enter the correct number of days, and agree to waive a corresponding number of days of VA benefits; (c) the veteran can indicate that he or she received no drill pay during the fiscal years shown on the form; or (d) the veteran can elect to waive drill pay in order to receive VA benefits.

Reserve components report the number of days during the fiscal year for which members received drill pay as 1 full day's duty pay for each 4-hour training assembly attended. Therefore, it is possible that on a "drill weekend" a reservist could receive 4 days of drill pay as he or she would be credited with attending two drill assemblies each day. A reservist receives only 1 day's pay for each day of the 2-week annual active duty training period (summer camp) which he or she attends.

Veterans may submit drill pay waivers on the computer-generated VA Form 21-8951 or on VA Form 21-8951-2. The VA Form 21-8951-2 can be downloaded from www.va.gov/vaforms and is similar to the computer-generated 21-8951 form and may be used in lieu of it. The main difference is that the VA Form 21-8951-2 does not have training days and identifying information preprinted on the form so this information must be written in by the veteran or by the reserve component.

"VETERANS AFFAIRS SERVICES" is a private company based in California. While providing information about VA and other governmental benefits, their agents market private investments and financial products. A VA Medical Center learned of the group while making plans to brief a National Guard unit. They were informed by the unit's commander that someone had already performed a briefing for them the week before. He also mentioned that members of the unit were a bit put off that the "VA" representative was trying to sell things to them.

The company has a web site on which they have a disclaimer in very small print that says *"Veterans Affairs Services is a non-profit veterans service organization"*

dedicated to serving the U.S. Armed Forces. This organization is in no way associated with the Federal Government,” but their seal and name give the impression that they are part of the Federal Government. They claim that they are “authorized” to train active duty, reserve, and National Guard units in VA benefits. They do not say on the web site that they are selling financial products. And while they describe themselves as a “non-profit veterans service organization” their agents are members of the Military Financial Planning Association, which is a for-profit organization.

SERVICEMENS' GOVERNMENT LIFE INSURANCE

SPECIAL DEATH GRATUITY The special SGLI death gratuity of \$150,000, retroactive to October 7, 2001, will be paid to survivors of those who died in a designated combat operation or combat zone or occurred while training for combat or performing hazardous duty, regardless of whether or not the member had SGLI coverage at the time of death. The Secretary of Defense has designated all areas where service members are in receipt of the “combat zone tax exclusion” as qualifying combat zones and all members deployed outside the United States on orders in support of Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom as participating in qualifying combat operations.

For information regarding death gratuities and claim assistance: Army - (800) 626-3317; Navy - (800) 368-3202; Air Force - (800) 433-0048; Marine Corps - (800) 847-1597; Coast Guard - (202) 267-1648.

VA ANNOUNCES 72 GRANTS FOR HOMELESS

PROGRAMS (VA News Release September 15, 2005)
WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has awarded 72 grants worth nearly \$14 million to public and private non-profit groups for programs assisting homeless veterans. (In Florida, Volunteers of America of Florida, Inc., in Lake City.) This latest round of grants brings to more than 1,100 the number of community-based beds provided by public and community non-profit and faith-based organizations in 34 states and the District of Columbia.

VA has the largest integrated network of homeless assistance programs in the country. It is the only federal agency that provides substantial one-on-one contact with the homeless. In many cities and rural areas, VA social workers and other clinicians conduct extensive outreach programs, clinical assessments, medical treatment, alcohol and drug abuse counseling and employment assistance. More information about VA's homeless programs is available on the Internet at <http://www.va.gov/homeless>.

IMPORTANT DATES IN OCTOBER

October 6 last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 11-01-2005 payments

October 10 Federal holiday - Columbus Day

October 21 last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 11-01-2005 payments

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 **1-800-827-1000**

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022
1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)

Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications
1-877-823-2378

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - **1-877-222-8387**

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) **1-877-838-2778**

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 **1-800-669-8477**

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -

CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 **1-800-733-8387**

Foreign Medical Program Office (medical treatment abroad) -

PO Box 65021, Denver, CO 80206-5021 **303-331-7590**

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL **727-398-9426**

6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 **352-793-7740**

Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL **850-453-4108/4846**

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 810 Vermont Ave NW, Washington, DC 20420 **1-800-697-6947**

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120
1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office **1-800-829-4833**

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: **www.va.gov**

VA Forms: **www.va.gov/vaforms**

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS)

www.warms.vba.va.gov

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessioned homes):

www.ocwen.com

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: **www.floridavets.org**

St. Pete Regional Office: **www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete**